



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

## Chapter 32: A Gathered Mind as a defence

### The steady defender

*“We cannot see clearly because we are agitated, and we are agitated because we cannot see clearly.” ~ Richard Gombrich*

*“In zazen, leave your front door and your back door open. Let thoughts come and go. Just don’t serve them tea.” ~ Shunryu Suzuki*

### Gathering the scattered mind

We now arrive at the fourth of our Five Defenders on the journey to freedom – ‘A Gathered Mind’, known in Pāli as *samādhi*. This Defender builds directly upon the foundation laid by ‘Healing Mindfulness’. While mindfulness is the faculty of *noticing* what arises in our experience, a Gathered Mind is the capacity to *gather* and *sustain* that awareness, bringing stability and clarity to the mind.

The word *samādhi* literally means ‘placing or bringing together,’ referring to the unification of the mind. It is the direct antidote to the scattered, restless, or agitated state – sometimes called *washing machine head* – that is intimately familiar to those struggling with harmful compulsions. If Healing Mindfulness is the lookout on our raft, A Gathered Mind is the keel and ballast, preventing it from capsizing and steadying its course in turbulent waters.

A mind lacking this quality is easily hijacked. A fleeting thought, an external trigger, or a wave of anxiety can send it spiraling into obsessive thinking or a

compulsive act. Developing a Gathered Mind provides the steadfastness needed to observe these internal storms without being swept away, allowing us to see cravings and aversions clearly without having to obey them.

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## Self-reflections

- ★ How scattered or gathered does the mind usually feel during an average day?
  - ★ What people, places, or thoughts most often scatter the attention?
  - ★ What does even a brief moment of a gathered, calm mind feel like in the body?
  - ★ When has a gathered state of mind helped me face a difficult emotion or an urge more wisely?
  - ★ How might a more gathered mind change my relationship with painful memories or anxious thoughts about the future?
  - ★ What simple, practical steps could I take today to invite more single-pointed attention into my life?
  - ★ How does a Gathered Mind feel like a 'defence'? What does it protect me from?
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## Journaling prompts

- ★ **Tracking the scatter:** For one day, make a note of when the mind feels most scattered. What were the triggers? What did it feel like? What helped you return to a more gathered state?
- ★ **The joy of calm:** Reflect on a time, however brief, when the mind felt naturally calm and at ease. Describe the inner and outer conditions that supported it. How can you invite more of those conditions into your life?
- ★ **The keel of the raft:** Describe a recent situation where you felt emotionally turbulent. How might a more Gathered Mind (the keel and ballast) have helped you navigate it with more stability?
- ★ **An experiment in single-tasking:** Choose one daily activity you usually do with distraction (like drinking coffee while checking your phone). For one week, commit to doing it with your full, undivided attention. Journal about

what you notice.

- ★ **From faculty to defender:** Write about the ways in which your concentration feels fragile (a faculty). What specific, small actions could you take to nurture it into a more reliable embodied strength (a Defender)?
  - ★ **A dialogue with the ‘washing machine’:** When the mind feels like a *washing machine*, write down the repetitive thoughts that are spinning. Then, write a compassionate response to them, acknowledging them without getting caught up in their spin.
  - ★ **The feeling of focus:** Sit for five minutes with the sole intention of keeping the mind on the breath. Afterward, journal about the experience. Was it difficult? Peaceful? Frustrating? What did you learn about the mind's habits?
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## Remember to remember

A Gathered Mind is the ballast of our raft. It does not stop the waves of life from rising, but it gives us a steady place from which to navigate them. Each time we return to the breath, each time we anchor in the present moment, we are training the mind to gather itself.

Remember that this is not about forcing rigid stillness but about allowing the natural turbulence of the mind to settle. In the quiet space that emerges, joy and ease naturally arise. This calm clarity is itself a taste of freedom, a powerful reminder that peace is not somewhere else but can be found right here, in each moment of cultivated steadiness. When the mind is gathered, the other Defenders flourish: Confidence grows, Courageous Effort becomes sustainable, Healing Mindfulness becomes penetrating, and Discernment shines clearly.

*“The practice is not about perfect stillness but about learning to rest in motion.” ~ Christina Feldman*

*“Concentration is the art of returning—again and again—to what matters most.” ~ Joseph Goldstein*

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